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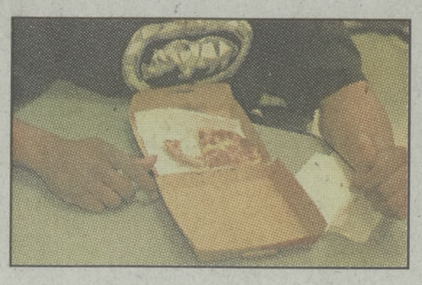

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The Valley Star

VOLUME 57, ISSUE NO. 1 | FEBRUARY 20, 2002 | LOS ANGELES VALLEY COLLEGE

Valley Gives Homage to Black History Month

STAR PHOTO/JORGE GALLEGOS

Oushane is playing the drums at Monarch Square showing the richness of black culture. More events will be showcased at campus throughout February as part of Black History Month.

BY SERENA DANIELS
STAR REPORTER

A number of events in honor of Black History Month will be held this month thanks to the Black Student Union (BSU) and the ASU.

Beginning Feb. 13 and lasting all month long, the BSU will be offering numerous cultural events including a black inventors museum, the Apollo Variety Show, even a special appearance by comedian and educator Mother Love.

Charla Hearn, president of the BSU said, "It's a time to remember who we are, to give homage to those that gave us the chance to get an education."

Dr. Carter G. Wilson founded Negro History Week in 1926 in the hopes of creating public awareness of the influence of African Americans in history. The week-long tribute turned into Black History Month and today serves as a time to celebrate the history as well as culture.

The BSU is the only black organization on campus, they sought out assistance from the ASU, which helped fund the events. According to Debra Faulk, commissioner of evening division, they have been struggling to organize the upcoming festivities since October last year.

The BSU holds about 30 members but only a few people were able to dedicate their time toward making these events possible.

"It's hard getting everybody together on one solid task," said Hearn of the lack of response from members and others on campus. "But the end result is better than any work that you put into it."

Aside from offering plenty of entertainment and celebrity speakers, the BSU has made an effort to make this year's Black Heritage Celebration educational. February 21 will hold a black inventor's museum and the black business fair. On Feb. 28 there will be an N.A.A.C.P. honorary reception held in the Fireside Lounge featuring speakers of the Tuskegee Airmen and Buffalo Soldiers.

Hearn added, "Even if only a few people go, that's a few more that will be educated."

Hearn wants to stress how important it is to educate the students and faculty at Valley as well as others in the community.

For more information on the upcoming Black Heritage celebration visit the ASU office and pick up a flyer.

Budget Cuts Squeezes L.A. Valley

BY OLIVER CACANANTA
STAR REPORTER

Balancing California's checkbook this year leaves community colleges on the chopping block once again. With the state facing a $12-billion budget deficit, Governor Davis' new budget proposal undercut several community college programs, affecting Valley college's faculty, staff and students.

"This is a tremendous hit," said Lou Albert, director of faculty and staff development. "We cannot provide the opportunities for faculty and staff to self-improve without these resources."

The Faculty and Staff Development Program confronts a $5.2 million reduction. The program is responsible for hiring new faculty and staff and, more importantly, opening opportunities for them to enhance their knowledge and skills. It maintains the Professional Media Resource Center and implements technological upgrades in Valley's infrastructure such as its telecommunication network.

Although the program has funding in the current school year, the governor's proposal will strip the program entirely. Its development goals for faculty and staff will be abandoned.

The same dilemma threatens Valley's CAL WORKs with a $58 million cutback.

"The worst case scenario conceivably will be for the program to go away, and this is sad," said Lynne Brower, the program's administrator. "We are the model program for other states, to show them that it works – people who are given an education, to have a career, leads to self-sufficiency."

CAL WORKs was initiated as part of the welfare reforms that swept the nation about five years ago. When the federal government enacted its welfare-to-work program, California followed suit.

The state program also allocated money to community colleges to keep welfare mothers in school, eventually giving them an educational foundation to compete in the job market.

CAL WORKs provide counseling, financial aid, book vouchers, materials, childcare and other critical services not only to welfare mothers but to Valley's many needy students as well. Some are referred to the program by the Department of Public and Social Services for training.

Overall, more than 1,600 students may be impacted in a reduction in CAL WORKs.

For their part, the community colleges are working hard to stem the tide of cuts. Lobby groups representing the schools and faculty have committed a strong stance to work with the state and the finance committee in reaching a compromise.

"This is just round one," said Tyree Wieder, Valley's president. She said it will be difficult to minimize the damage.

When push comes to shove, Staff Development and CAL WORKs will then be forced to seek outside sources such as grant money for survival.

Former Secretary Dies, 92

BY LINDA TOPDJIAN
STAR REPORTER

Marian Evans Craig, secretary of three Valley College presidents, died Jan. 25, while still an active member of Valley. She was 92.

COURTESY OF EILEEN PEARL

"Marian Craig, was very dedicated to the college, the students, and had a long record of raising funds for the college," said Tyree Wieder, Valley president. "She will definitely be missed."

Craig was born in Monmouth, Ill., on July 29, 1910. She was the younger of two children born 10 years after her siser Gladys.

She attended Lombard College for several years where she joined the Alpha Xi Delta Sorority. Because of the Depression, she was forced to leave college and instead went to business college. After completing her studies, she worked in various secretarial positions in the Bloomington area.

Marian married Ellis Craig in 1936 and in 1942, they moved to California, settling in North Hollywood where their two children, Jane and Ellias Jr., were born. Her husband, Ellias, died in 1976.

She worked for the local school district in the late 1950s. In the early 1960s, she started working at Valley, where she held several positions, including secretary to the president for many years.

"Marian, was enamored with the entire college, everybody liked her," said Austin Conover, curator of the Valley College Historical Museum. "She had so much bubbling energy that she put into everything she was involved in."

Craig also attended Valley, where she and her son, Eli, received their degrees at the same time. She was a founding member of the Valley College Patrons Association and continued as an active member for more than 30 years, serving as their secretary.

During her career, she raised money for special projects and scholarships for students.

"She was a special lady and will be greatly missed by the college and the Patrons Association," said Eileen Pearl secretary. of the Foundation and Community Relations.

Marian was well known on the campus because of her enthusiasm for Valley. "She was a exceptionally fine woman, always ready to volunteer to help students in any way she could," said Roger Graham, professor emeritus at Valley "This is a great loss to the college and to me personally."

Marian was the executive secretary since February 1999 for the Retiree's Association. Donations have been made to the Patrons Association in her memory.

Prop. A On Its Way at LAVC

BY SERENA DANIELS
STAR REPORTER

President Tyree Wieder announced the many improvements that will begin taking shape as early as next month, at a town hall meeting attended by about 50 faculty, staff and students in the cafeteria conference room on Feb. 14th.

The campus will undergo a series of renovations within the next year and a half, including plans to replace the bungalows with permanent buildings, creating new parking lots, and adding a new business technology building.

Among the speakers was President Tyree Wieder, Chancellor Dr. Mark Drummond, and Fred Parker, senior project director for URS Construction Services, the company chosen to take on the project.

"We are going to abolish the bungalows," said Wieder, who received a round of applause for this statement.

Last April, a $165 million bond was approved for Valley College to make improvements. And by March, this money will be used to change everything from giving a much-needed fresh coat of paint to possibly building a new parking structure and installing air conditioning in every class room.

"The bond was passed to move us ahead in a big leap," said Dr. Drummond. "We need to focus the bond project so it will really move us into the future."

Valley has also hired on Lever Studios to conduct a comprehensive study about how the school is used on a daily basis. They will determine where wheelchair ramps are needed, how people enter classrooms, even what can be done to make more space in the restrooms.

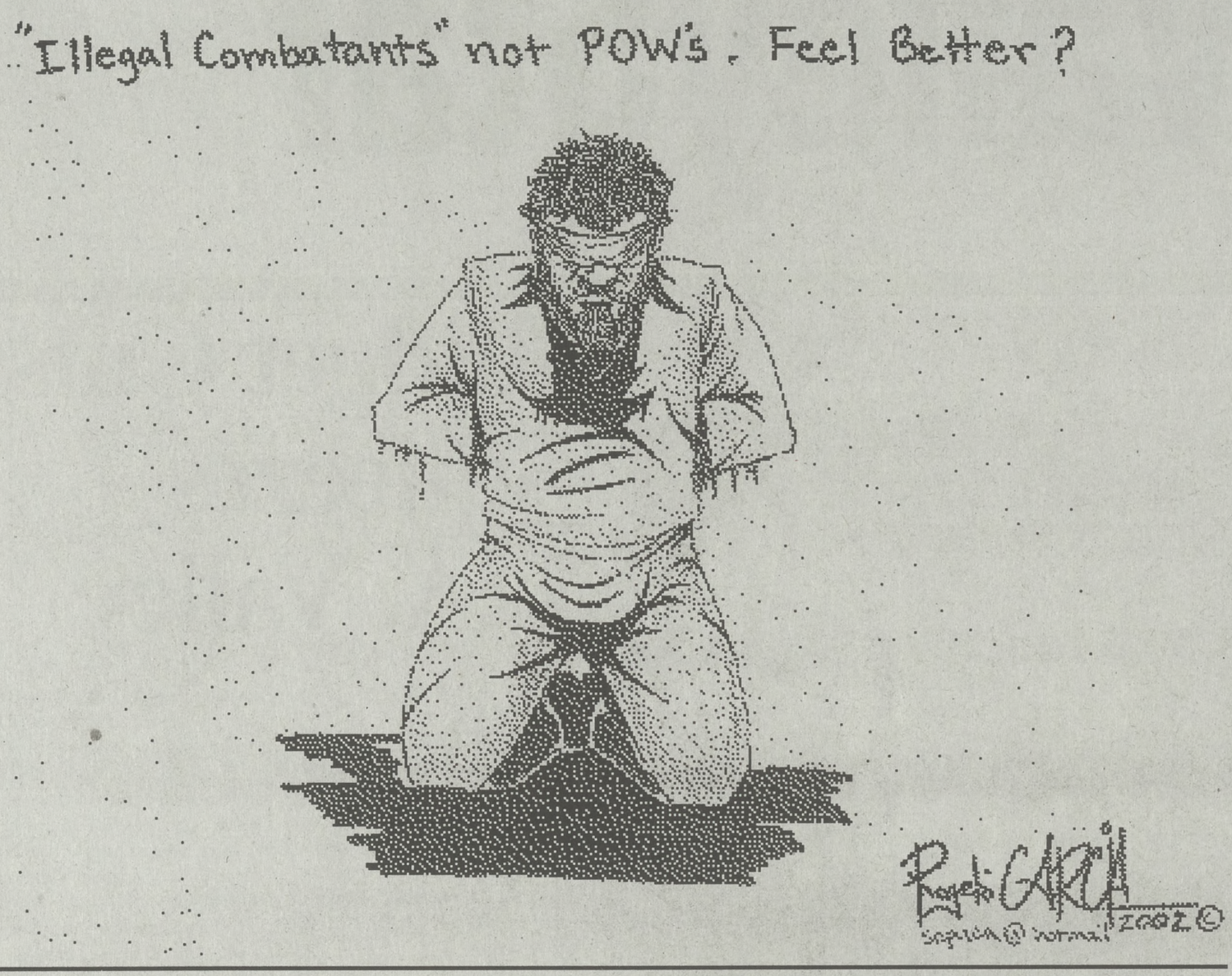
Valley College opened its doors in September 1949 on the Van Nuys High School campus. Its student population was around 400 and the faculty consisted of about 23 instructors. Two years later, Valley moved to its current location on Fulton and over the years, new buildings were constructed. Valley currently has more than 17,000 students and a faculty of 200 hundred full-time and 275 part-time instructors.

Today, Valley remains one of the top community colleges in the Los Angeles Community College District but it is often criticized for its out-dated landscape and buildings.

Another subject brought up in the meeting was the lighting issues, a problem that has been affecting many night students and which will be resolved in the near future by Viron, the firm working on those matters.

Phase II will take place over the next couple of years and includes plans for building improvements and additions, as well as possibly adding a drive-around loop designed to allow students easier access to different parking lots without having to exit the campus.

commentary



"Illegal Combatants:" A Deep Hatred Rooted in Double Standards

BY ROGELIO GARCIA

Why do they hate us? Well, check out the deal at Guantanamo, and see what you think.

We go along for months having a war, the war in Afghanistan, the war on terrorism, the war to get Osama bin Laden "dead or alive," troops on the ground, bombs in the air: in other words, WAR. Those of us who suggested that maybe war was not the right choice of words for this situation were booed for being insufficiently bloodthirsty, and so we went along with it.

Now we've won the "war." So we take the prisoners we've captured to our base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and suddenly announce that they are not prisoners of war after all, because this isn't really a war we've been fighting (I guess I didn't get the memo). Therefore, the prisoners are ``illegal combatants," and we don't have to treat them in accord with the Geneva Convention on POWs.

This is the reason why a lot of people hate us, for the sheer bloody arrogance of having it both ways all the time, for thinking that we are above the rules, that we can laugh at treaties, that we can do whatever we want, we don't have to keep our word or behave like other civilized nations, and we can just tell people to lag off when they raise questions.

Now, among thoughtful world citizens, this is not why they hate us, but why they consider us stupid. Did you ever see a deal that makes us look worse? We claim we don't have to allow the International Red Cross to inspect the conditions at Guantanamo, but you know perfectly well if Americans were being held as POWs (or even semi-POWs) anywhere in the world, we would raise holy hell if the Red Cross weren't allowed to see them.

Nobody has any idea if, when or how these prisoners are going to be tried. And the insanely ironic part is this is all happening in Cuba, where Fidel Castro has been listening to lectures from us on human rights and the correct treatment of prisoners for 45 years.

What's even dumber is that we already have allowed the Red Cross to inspect the quarters at Gitmo, so we're losing a disastrous battle on the public relations front for no reason at all. When Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld was questioned about the photographs of the prisoners (bound and gagged hand and foot, blindfolded, ears covered, forced to kneel) he reacted as though it were presumptuous to even raise questions about it.

Even more disturbing was a recent statement made by retired Gen. Bernard Trainor on the prisoners at Guantanamo Bay. "Well, they like to spend a lot of time on their knees anyway," Trainor said. Oh yea, they have all the reason in the world to respect America.

Hahn: A Man of Integrity or Another Political Lackey?

What's black and white with blue all over? The answer: Los Angeles Mayor James K. Hahn and Los Angeles Police Chief Bernard C. Parks fighting over the LAPD.

After weeks of waiting to hear if Hahn was going to support Parks for another term as LAPD chief, the city got an answer: He will not. On Feb. 7 Hahn held a press conference to announce his opposition to another term for Parks. At the news conference, Hahn denounced the chief's leadership when he accused the LAPD of "falling short in its implementation of reform." The mayor addressed his disapproval of Parks as his choice for police chief by saying, "He's opposed to police reform in the context that I believe in it."

The news of Hahn's decision came as a shock to many of the mayor's and the chief's supporters. The decision was condemned by much of the African American community and their leaders, who felt that Hahn had betrayed their trust in voting him in as mayor. "I think it insults my community," said Los Angeles City Councilman Nate Holden. There is even talk of a possible recall election among Park backers.

In my opinion, however, Hahn made a bold move in opposing Parks as police chief. After all, Parks was brought in to appease the African American community after the L.A riots. In addition, when most of the African American community turned out to vote for Hahn last year, they might have felt that they now had the upper hand in L.A. politics, having voted for someone with a long standing relationship with them.

The problem I find in Hahn's decision lies in his timing. The mayor spoke against Parks just days before the beginning of Black History Month. What was his motive for doing this? Hahn knows that Black History month is a time when the African American community unites and praises their leaders. So, did the mayor act in the best interest of the city or was he persuaded or pressured to make his decision against chief Parks?

There is no definite answer to the question. However, Hahn did personally appoint the five-panel committee that will ultimately rule whether to appoint Parks to another term as police chief. Therefore, it is not unreasonable in presuming that the panel will act in the mayor's favor. Then again, they cannot avoid Park's accomplishments, if any.

The Valley Star

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CampusView

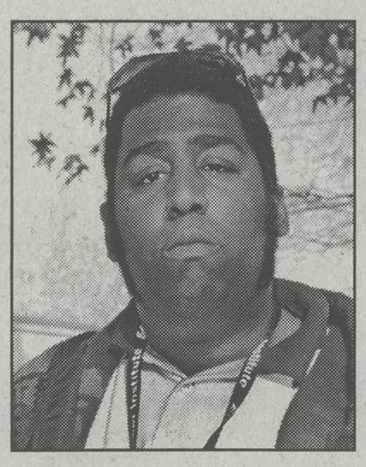
How do you feel about the United States' treatment of the prisoners in Cuba?

BY MARCY PETRIQUE
STAR REPORTER

STAR PHOTOS/MARCY PETRIQUE

"If they have good solid evidence, then I think that's fine; but if they're really not sure, they're just speculating or assuming, then that's uncalled for."

Lourdes Ramos
Undeclared

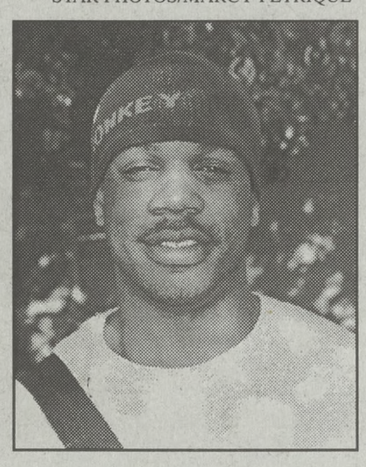


"I think they're getting what they got coming to them... They have no conscience at all, so I don't really see why we should be so especially nice to them...I doubt that the Northern Alliance would treat them any better."

Mike McKinney
Lab Volunteer (Computer Science)

"I feel like they're treating them just fine. I don't think they should be treated specially. I mean they are prisoners of war."

Christina Donaldson
Transfer Student



"I don't really know too much about it, but from what I know about prisoners, period; prisoners don't get treated that well anywhere, so it sucks."

Kory Ward
Psychology/Management

Write a letter to the editor
StareditorsLAVC@hotmail.com
Please include your name and telephone number
Letter may be edited. Deadline: Friday 4:30 p.m.

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Valley Life

Campus Scene

■ **Cal State Long Beach**
Cal State Long Beach will only be accepting applications until Feb. 15 for Fall 2002. All other CSU's are still accepting applications for majors that are not impacted. Visit the Career/transfer center for a list of impacted majors and additional transfer information.

■ **Godspell**
Thurs.-Sat., Feb. 21,21,23,28, March 1, 2, Horseshoe Theatre, **8 p.m.** Admission charge

■ **Ricardo Cobo, Classical Guitarist**
Sat., Feb. 23 Music Recital Hall, **8 p.m.**, Admission charge

■ **"Mother Love" with guest artist:**
Lynwood High School Gospel Choir, **7 p.m.-10 p.m. Feb. 20** Monarch Hall

■ **Black Inventors Museum**
Monarch Hall. **Feb. 21, 9 a.m.-2 p.m. 5-8 p.m.**

■ **Black Business Fair and African Market Festival**
Monarch Square/ Monarch Hall. **Feb. 21, 9 a.m.-9 p.m.**

■ **Searching the Online Catalog**
Workshop covers basic and advanced searching in the Online library catalog. Tues. **Feb. 26, 9 a.m.** in the LAIR computer lab. First come, first serve.

■ **How to Locate Journal and Newspaper Articles**
Workshop introduces you to the library's print and electronic resources. Feb. 27, 9-10 a.m. in the LAIR computer lab. First come, first serve.

■ **Internet Research**
Workshop covers searching tips for both subject direction and search Engines, and evaluation Internet researches. LAIR, Thurs. Feb. 28 12 - 1 p.m.

■ **Honoring our Heroes Reception**
Tuskegee Airmen and Buffalo Soldiers. Fireside Room. **Feb. 28, 1 p.m.-3 p.m.**

■ **Taking Care of Ourselves**
Guest Speaker: Jo Ann Dawson, M.D.Fireside Room. **Feb. 28, 7 p.m.-9 p.m.**

■ **Julie Long, Flutist**
Thurs., Feb. 28
Music Recital Hall, **11:30 a.m.**

Students Hot for Pizza But Cold on Salad

BY NANCY KENNEDY
STAR REPORTER

Valley College serves its more than 18,000 students a little like Burger King – it tries to make sure that students have it their way.

Valley offers 1,801 classes, dozens of areas of study and a wide variety of extracurricular activities. However, one area the school shorts its students is in the types of food they can purchase at the cafeteria.

"I would like to see some bigger name restaurants come in here," said student Sylvia Martinez. "I would like to see a Carl's Jr, or maybe a Taco Bell."

Valley College is in its second year of a five-year contract with Orion Food Systems. Orion gives the college seven choices to select from when it comes to providing food. This semester, Hot Stuff Pizza joined Mean Gene's Burgers, Cinnamon Street Bakery, Smash Hit Subs, Eddie Peppers Great Mexican Food, and the salad bar. Cramped space prohibits Valley from offering more selections, but the pizza seems to be a big hit.

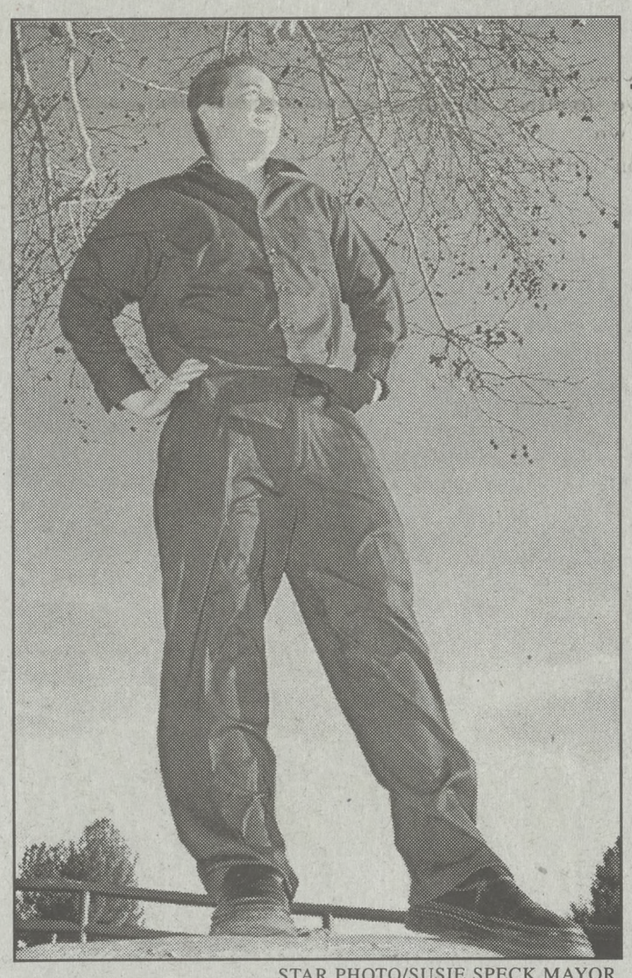
"Until the addition of Hot Stuff Pizza, Mean Gene's Burgers was the most popular counter," said Mary John, cafeteria manager. "The new selection attracts a lot of attention and the feedback has been favorable."

Orion's two other selections are Joey Pagoda's Oriental Express and MacGregor's Market. Tom Jacobsmeyer, vice president of administrative services, said he is the one who selects which eateries go into the cafeteria. He said students seem to like the choices he has made thus far with the exception of the salad bar.

"The salad bar is not profitable," Jacobsmeyer said. "But influential people enjoy that selection so it will stay."

STAR PHOTO/ RACHEL TELLER
A couple share a kiss before sharing their pizza at the newly opened Hot Stuff Pizza located in the cafeteria.

Extra Effort Pays Off For Speech Student



STAR PHOTO/SUSIE SPECK MAYOR
Charles Josh Haley looks forward to a bright future.

BY SUSIE SPECK MAYOR
STAR REPORTER

What would you say about a guy who takes five years to complete his associate's degree?

Well, if you're talking about 22-year-old Charles Josh Haley, you might say that he understands the concept of "whatever it takes."

Haley has been attending night classes at Valley College while working during the day at a location company, assisting film and television productions with location. It is a job that demands 60 to 40 hours per week. He drives more than an hour to get to school from his home in Lake Los Angeles, which is about 20 miles east of Lancaster.

The extra effort has paid off. He was recently offered a scholarship to Northern Arizona University, in Flagstaff. The scholarship was based on his performance in speech competitions as a member of the Valley College Speech Team.

At the the Mt. Sac/ Cal Baptist Super Swing Tournament last month, Haley took second place in the category of Varsity Informative and third place for Varsity Persuasive. He was also a finalist in Prose Interpretation. In addition, the Valley team received an award recognizing it as one of the top three community colleges competing. In early April, Haley and his team will compete in the national competition in Fort Worth, Texas.

Currently, Haley is taking Critical Thinking 105. At the end of the semester, he will have his associate's degree, and then it's on to Northern Arizona U, where he will major in speech communications.

Haley points to head coach Duane Smith as his main inspiration.

When asked what it is about Haley that makes him so successful, Smith said, "He gives 110 percent in everything that he does."

Shaggy: *Hotshot Ultramix*

BY JAMIE DE LEON
STAR REPORTER

One would think that in the polyglot, cross-cultural, melting-pot-and-pan world we call home, cultural authenticity would mean less and less, at least when it comes to creating pop. Yet many hardcore reggae fans (and stoners) look at the careers of stars such as Shabba Ranks, Beenie Man and Mr. Vegas and furrow their brows in disapproval, as if somehow getting people outside of Jamaica (or Brooklyn) to buy your music constitutes a sellout of epic proportions.

He may be a sellout, and he may not get to don the crown of purity, but there's simply no denying that Shaggy can crank out a jam. Shaggy burst onto the charts in 1993 with the infectious "Oh, Carolina," a cover of a song first recorded in the mid-'60s by the Prince Busterñ produced act, the Folkes Brothers. He followed that up in 1995 with the #1 "Boombastic," which introduced Shaggy's winking, leering vocal style half dancehall braggadocio, half vaudeville shtick.

Shaggy's sound married technofied bangs and clangs with summer-breeze-cool seduction, and the Boombastic album earned him a Grammy that year for Best Reggae Album. His latest, "Hotshot Ultramix," finds him on a new label and diving into a more techno-happy-club-sounding realm, a move helped along no doubt by his association with Minneapolis soulsters Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis (the masterminds behind hits by Force MDs, Human League, Boyz II Men and, of course, Janet Jackson).

The first single is "Dance and Shout," which interpolates Janet's brother Mikey's "Shake Your Body" and in its mindless but insistent grooves has sandy-summer-beach-hit footprints all over it. Of course, rapping over preexisting hits is a classic reggae move. Another treat here is "Hope," which shimmers with an emotional depth and soulfulness that Shaggy has never shown before. It's a keeper. Granted, such stylistic largesse might make the faithful nervous, but Shaggy does reggae, pop and R&B proud on this fun and fierce collection.

album review

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FIRST PERSON: *JACQUI BROWN*

My 7 year old cannot understand how anyone would choose to go back to school, let alone pay for it, especially if you don't have to!

As a kid growing on a farm in Canada, our main concern was whether or not it would snow hard enough to keep us from going to school. We prayed for bad weather. We still had to wake up early and do our chores, but the payoff was that we didn't have to think about school for the rest of the day.

STAR PHOTO/SUSIE SPECK MAYOR

When I was a kid, we went from elementary school to high school (there was no middle school), and if we were lucky, to a college or a university. There weren't too many of us who went beyond high school for many reasons. Maybe we got married and had kids and it tempered our drive for advanced education.

I'm sure my parents thought about college for their children, but with many kids and very little money, college was not an option. Life beyond high school was up to us. Maybe get a job, get married, buy a house, have a family. That was the norm. A select few, whose parents had the ability to save money, did go to college. College was mostly a way to get away from home, and many of my friends had to work to continue their education.

I have worked my entire life, moved here from Canada, have a successful business, have been married to the same wonderful boy for almost 23 years, have two children, a dog, a home, and, luckily, great in-laws.

So here I am, 40 something, standing in line to register for college, skimming through a catalogue, trying to decide what direction my life should be taking. I am surrounded by throngs of youngsters with backpacks slung over their shoulders, cell phones glued to their ears, and I think, wow, I'm pretty old to be going after a degree. But not far behind me I see an elderly man, carefully balancing on his cane while trying to finish his college application. Beyond him I see I see several other people that are perhaps my age. I smile. I am not alone.

I like to think of this as re-educating myself and being able to go to school, by choice, and choosing one of many areas to study. I can study the things I am interested in now, but not when I was younger. We can go back and re-create ourselves. We can start at the beginning and build a new life. I once read about a woman who wanted to study law but she was worried because by the time she finished her studies she would be 47. But no matter what she did, she was still going to turn 47.

So as I see it as an aspiring writer, it's never too late to challenge yourself. Jump in, get your feet wet. If you sink, your friends will applaud you and throw you a raft. Life is

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Sports

Valley Teams on Top of Conference

BY PEDRO OLIVERA
STAR REPORTER

The Los Angeles Valley Monarchs men's and women's basketball teams have been on a serious run since conference play began on Jan. 9. Both teams have only five losses entering their final game of the season tonight against College of the Canyons. They both are dominating one conference opponent after another as they sit atop the Western State Conference South division.

The men finished a difficult stretch of games last week that saw them narrowly escape with a 62-60 victory against Santa Monica on Feb.13 and a 71-68 win this Saturday versus Bakersfield. The Monarchs have now pushed their overall record to 26-5 and 11-0 in conference.

The men have already clinched the conference title and are looking to go undefeated. They are ranked sixth in the Commission On Athletics state poll and third in the South Region as of Feb. 12.

Valley wing player Neverson White was named western State Conference South Division player of the week. The 6-5 sophomore scored a combined 27 points in the two victories for Valley this past week. He also grabbed 12 rebounds, had seven assists, five steals, and went five for five from behind the three-point line.

Equally as impressive as the men's team, has been the performance of the women's team. They also won their last two games, but they did it in a more convincing fashion. They clobbered Santa Monica, 69-40, and then followed that dominating win with an 85-67 thrashing of Bakersfield.

The women are now 27-5 overall and10-1 in conference. The women are fifth in the COA state poll and fourth in the Southern Region, as of Feb. 12. However they haven't yet clinched sole possession of the conference title. If the Lady Monarchs lose to College of the Canyons at home tonight, and College of the Canyons defeats Citris on Saturday, it will still leave Valley in the driver's seat. Valley and College of the Canyons will both share a 10-2 record in conference play, but Valley will have a better overall record, which will give them the conference title.

Both Valley teams got hot at the right time. They are playing their best basketball as they head into the playoffs. If both valley teams can get passed imposing Ventura College, who is number one in the women's poll, and is undefeated in the WSC men's north division, there is no reason either one of them shouldn't go deep into the state championship playoffs.

STAR PHOTO/SALVADOR AGUILAR

Mana Allison, 22, drives to the hoop as Glendale defender tries to stop her. The Vaqueros fell to the Monarchs 76-49.

Sports Schedule

MEN'S BASKETBALL

Wed. 20 - College of the Canyons @ Valley, 7:30 p.m.

Fri. and Sat. 1-2 - 1st Round So. Cal. Regionals @ TBA 7:00 p.m.

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Wed. 20 - College of the Canyons @ Valley, 5:30 p.m.

BASEBALL

Thur. 21 - Golden West @ Golden West, 2 p.m.

Sat. 23 - Irvine Valley @ Valley, 1 p.m.

Thur. 28 - Pierce @ Pierce, 2 p.m.

SOFTBALL

Thur. 21 - Bakersfield @ Bakersfield, 2:30 p.m.

Tues. 26 - Citrus @ Valley, 2:30 p.m.

Thur. 28 - College of the Canyons @ College of the Canyons, 2:30 p.m.

The U.S. National Soccer Team Gets Ready for the World Cup

STAR PHOTOS/JORGE GALLEGOS

The U.S. National Soccer team won the 2002 Gold Cup as part of their practice for the 2002 Korea/Japan World Cup.
Left: Josh Wolff celebrates scoring the first goal of the Gold Cup Final.
Right: Defender Martinez tries to block Jeff Agoos' shot on goal.

Talkin' Sports

PEDRO OLIVERA
SPORTS EDITOR

Last season the Los Angeles Lakers did what many experts said couldn't be done, they sleepwalked through the regular season and then steamrolled through the playoffs to win their second-consecutive championship. Logic would have you believe that you can't simply flick a switch and turn up their level of play in the playoffs, but that's exactly what they did last year and it appears that's what they're planning to do this year too.

No one has any doubt that the Lakers are by far the best team in the NBA. They have shown over the past two seasons that they are the superior team in basketball. The problem is that they don't always show up to play with the intensity required to compete at the highest level. They haven't yet realized that as defending champions, every team in the league is going to come at them with their best effort. When the Lakers don't match that effort, they lose. The lack of effort is precisely why the Lakers have lost to Chicago (twice), Memphis, Denver and some of the other bottom feeders in the NBA.

Before the season started, experts were talking about the Lakers breaking the record for most victories in a season 72-10. It sure looked that way when they started the season at 16-1. Since then, they have struggled to gain any rhythm or consistency. The injury to Shaquille O'Neal's toe has also slowed the team's progress. Couple that with the poor performance of the Lakers' power forwards, the inconsistent shooting of the perimeter players, and the Lakers are lucky to be in second place in the Pacific Division.

There is no need to panic if you are a Laker fan. When June comes around, the Lakers should win the title for the third consecutive time.

The Lakers aren't the only story happening in Los Angeles. It's the middle of February and the Clippers are right around .500. The addition of Elton Brand from Chicago has made the Clippers a legitimate playoff contender. Key players like Quentin Richardson and Corey Maggette have stepped up their games and are showing that they deserve to play big minutes.

The most surprising thing about the Clippers' season is that they are doing it without superstar Lamar Odom. He has been sidelined the last couple of weeks with a wrist injury. He and missed five games earlier this season for violating the NBA's drug policies.

Odom's contract ends this season and Clipper owner, Donald Sterling will have to decide if he wants to pay his star big money. If Sterling doesn't want to pay him, the smart thing to do is trade Odom. He is a great player, but the Clippers are rich in wing players who are under contract for the next couple of years. By trading Odom, the Clippers can get an experienced point guard who can lead them through the playoffs. They can also trade for a center who can be a more imposing force in the middle than current center, Michael Olowokandi.

A lot of the credit for the Clippers' success should go to second-year coach Alvin Gentry. He has the Clippers playing hard and dominating at home. If they can start beating the teams they're supposed to beat on the road, the Clippers will become a major force in the West.

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